

## What?



Having people sort symbolic images to find out their thoughts and attitudes about a topic

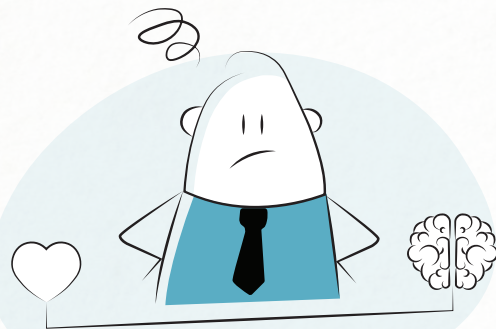
Image Sorting is a method used to find out peoples' associations and perceptions of particular topics. Engaging in activities in which people sort, discuss, and create stories using prepared images is a powerful way of revealing the emotions, relationships, and values people associate with other people, places, and objects in a situation. For example, in the context of job searching, an image of money may correspond to feelings about success or advancement; whereas in the context of crime, money may represent vulnerability or corruption. This exercise sparks a conversation about abstract ideas and feelings that otherwise may remain undetected in a traditional Ethnographic Interview.

Image Sorting works by presenting participants with images of common objects, people, or places and having them sort according to particular themes or criteria. For example, you might ask participants to sort images according to community versus solitary activities to get a sense of how they feel about social responsibility versus individual ambition. This can be done one-on-one or with a group of participants. Several sessions with different individual participants are usually required in order for patterns to emerge and generalizations to be made. The Image Sorting exercise with a group of participants is effective for understanding shared beliefs and/or where people diverge on a given topic.

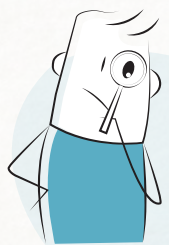
## Why?



Capture users' points of view



Reveal relationships

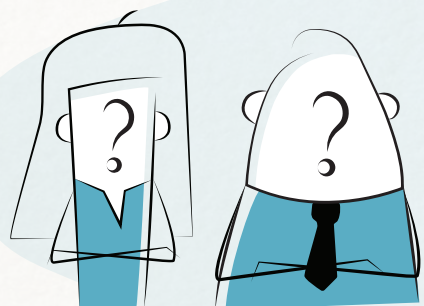


Need evidence for the research



Ground conversation with artifacts

## When?



Understand people (end users and other stakeholders) and identify knowledge organization principles when mental categories are difficult to verbalize.

## How?

Step 1

### Determine what topics you want to explore

Based on your project intent, decide what attitudes you want to explore that will help you understand how people think about a given topic. For example, if working on a service design initiative, you may want to understand peoples' attitudes and perceptions about what constitutes good and bad service experiences.

topic 1

topic 2

topic 3

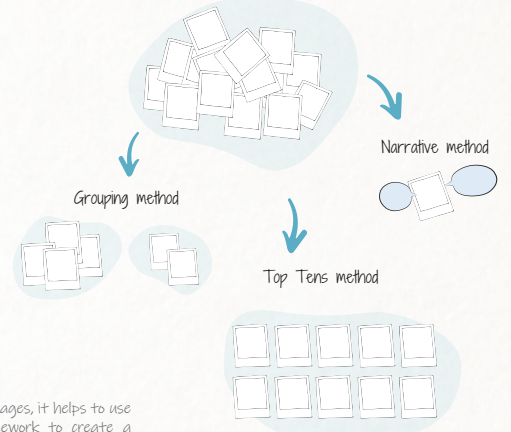
topic 4

topic 5

Step 2

### Select an Image Sorting method

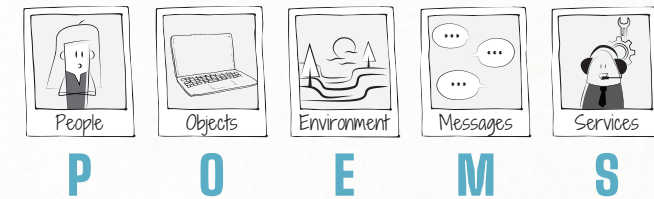
Depending on what you want to explore, employ an appropriate sorting method. Use a grouping method for clustering images based on a particular criterion. For example, to understand attitudes about environments, you might ask participants to sort images according to notions of "welcoming" versus "unwelcoming." Use the Top Tens method and ask participants to express their personal values by ranking images from favorite to least favorite. Use the Narrative method to make participants use images to tell stories that reflect their perceptions or attitudes.



Step 3

### Select images

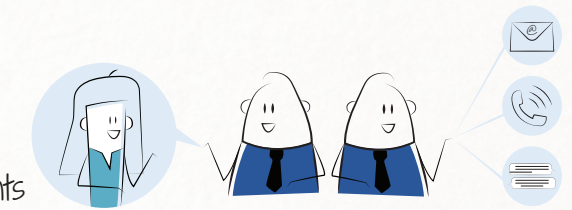
Search for images that can be used for sorting activities. When seeking out images, it helps to use the POEMS (people, objects, environments, messages, and services) framework to create a comprehensive set that will allow participants to express their values and attitudes in several ways.



Step 4

### Invite participants

Invite people to participate in the sorting activity. Explain what they will be doing and the reason why it is being done. Indicate where and when the activity will take place and how long they can expect to be there. In most cases, compensation is provided to participants for their time.



Step 5

### Conduct Image Sorting exercises

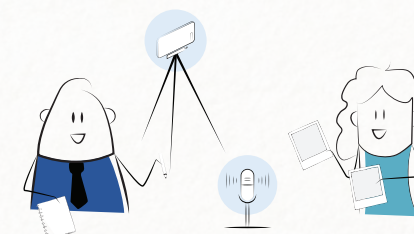
Provide instructions to participants at the start of each exercise. Allow time for them to do the exercise alone or in groups. At the completion of each exercise, photograph the resulting sort.



Step 6

### Engage in conversations.

Ask participants to explain why they sorted the images as they did. Have team members take notes to capture responses or, if participants permit it, use audio or video recordings. Often useful insights can be gained by asking participants to elaborate on their answers and talk more broadly about what informed their thinking, what associations the images brought to mind, and how they relate them to their daily lives.



Step 7

### Document photos and responses

Gather photographs of image sorts and corresponding responses into documents that can be reviewed and analyzed by your team. Discuss the attitudes and perceptions participants have shown through the activity and gain insights.



# IMAGE SORTING

Using these images, tell me a story...